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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify the independent and conjoint influence of attitude similarity and initial interactions on interpersonal attraction to relative strangers. The 124 college students who were participants in the study were informed that they would be working on a project with either an attitudinally similar or dissimilar stranger (based on an attitudinal measure previously administered). Half of the participants were then allowed to engage in an initial interaction with their partner and the other half were not. All of the participants completed a measure of interpersonal attraction. The results indicated that initial interaction and attitude similarity combined to influence attraction to relative strangers. Initial interaction had a positive impact on attraction, but only for individuals paired with attitudinally dissimilar partners. Individuals paired with attitudinally similar partners were more attracted to their partners than were inidividuals paired with attitudinally dissimilar partners, but only when they had not engaged in an initial interaction with the partner. (Author/FL)

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ON THE EPHEMERAL NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE SIMILARITY AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION DURING INITIAL ENCOUNTERS

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Over the past five decades researchers have identified several variables related to interpersonal attraction. This research has examined the correlates of attraction in both long-term (Hunt, 1935; Newcomb & Svehla, 1937; Vreeland & Corey, 1935; Winslow, 1937) and short-term relationships (Newcomb, 1961).

In recent years, most reported research on interpersonal attraction focuses on the attraction of individuals to relative strangers (Byrne, 1971; Clore & Baldridge, 1968; Dion, 1972; Griffitt, 1969; Miller, 1970), with attitude similarity receiving the most attention. Research on the attitude similarity-attraction relationship among strangers typically employs some variant of the bogus stranger technique developed by Byrne (1961). Researchers employing this technique consistently find that attitude similarity is positively related to interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1961; Byrne, London & Griffitt, 1968).

Studies using the bogus stranger technique have been conducted primarily to build and test theory. In this capacity, it has consistently supported both balance and reinforcement models. As a by-product of this theory testing process, several variables, including attitude similarity, which may influence pre-acquaintance attraction in non-laboratory settings have been identified. For example, computer dates and job interviewers are often provided with attitudinal information prior to interacting with strangers. Experiments dealing with these situations indicate that attitude similarity among computer dates and with job interviewees

is positively related to pre-acquaintance attraction (Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970; Griffitt & Jackson, 1970; Shaughnessy & Levinger, 1969).

Situations in which attitudes are formally discolsed prior to initial interactions are somewhat atypical of the types of situations in which interpersonal relationships normally develop; individuals typically do not disclose attitudinal information during the initial stages of acquaintanceship (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, Gardner, Parks, Shulman & Miller, 1976; Miller & Steinberg, 1975; Miller, 1978; Newcomb, 1961). Nevertheless, there are numerous naturally occurring situations in which the attitudes of strangers are available to individuals prior to initial interactions with the strangers and to which the findings of bogus stranger research may generalize. People are often [illegible]-placed in situations where they know they will be interacting with another stranger. Sometimes the strangers may perceive that certain attitudes of the other will influence the quality and/or outcome of their subsequent interactions. When this occurs the individuals will probably attempt to ascertain the interaction-relevant attitudes of the other before the initial interaction. This information could be obtained from mutual acquaintances. Thus, if mutual acquaintances exist, individuals probably will have some knowledge of the interaction-relevant attitudes of strangers prior to interacting with them.

It is not being argued that attitudinal information elicited from mutual acquaintances will be perceived the same way as attitudinal information disclosed by the actual stranger. Rather, the point being made is that the findings of bogus stranger reasearch may well generalize

to these naturally occurring situations. What is not clear from most of this research is how pre-interaction knowledge concerning attitude similarity combines with the typically non-attitudinal information exchanged during initial interactions to influence attraction. The present study focuses on this concern in examining the possible independent and conjoint effects of initial interactions and attitude similarity on the attraction variable.

Initial Interaction and Attraction

While research on attraction to strangers has isolated several variables that influence attraction to strangers, one potentially powerful variable, the opportunity to engage in an initial interaction with the stranger, has been neglected. Most reported studies isolate the variables of interest while providing no opportunity for the participants to interact. A few studies (Brewer & Brewer, 1968; Brink, 1977; Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970; Byrne & Griffitt, 1966; Lombardo, Weiss & Stich, 1973) have allowed participants to engage in limited interactions to ascertain the influence of attitude similarity on attraction after individuals engage in these interactions. However, no reported research has examined the impact of "typical" initial interaction with a stranger on subsequent attraction.

Although research on attraction to strangers has not addressed the impact of initial interaction on attraction, some research with relative strangers and with long-term relational partners indicates that the opportunity to interact with strangers may positively influence attraction. Byrne, Ervin, and Lamberth (1970) examined the impact of attitude similarity and physical attractiveness on attraction among opposite-sex dyads, some of whom engaged in 30 minute interactions and some of whom did not.

In both situations participants were more attracted to similar others. Additionally, while the authors report no comparison for interactants and non-interactants, an inspection of the reported means reveals that both similar and dissimilar interactants were more attracted to their partners than their non-interacting counterparts. Unfortunately, there were a number of differences between the interactive and non-interactive situations other than the opportunity to communicate. Thus, while these differences in attraction cannot be directly interpreted as resulting from the opportunity to communicate, they do suggest that something about the initial interactions may have led to the differences observed.

Several studies of long-term relationships indicate that the opportunity to interact as influenced by propinquity, may be positively related to attraction (Burchinal, 1960; Newcomb, 1961; Ramsoy, 1966). Most of this research concerns pre-marital residential propinquity, but Newcomb's classic longitudinal research focused upon the development of interpersonal networks among previously unacquainted individuals. While there are a number of possible interpretations of his finding that propinquity within the residence is positively related to attraction, one possible explanation concerns relative opportunity to interact.

Although little existing research bears directly on the relationship between initial interaction and attraction, some theoretical orientations do suggest that initial interaction and attraction should be positively related. Various theorists assume that individuals strive for a stable, predictable, and controllable environment (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Miller & Steinberg, 1975). Knowing that one is about to interact with a stranger would likely threaten this goal; i.e., the stranger's behavior and reactions

to the individual's behavior would be difficult to predict and control. Indeed, one recent theoretical formulation (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) suggests that the main goal of interactants during initial encounters is to increase predictability of interaction behaviors or reduce uncertainty. This suggests that information exchanged during initial interaction may provide a basis for increasing predictability by reducing uncertainty, a possibility supported by the research of Lalljee and Cook (1973).

Various reinforcement models of interpersonal attraction posit that individuals are attracted to those who provide rewards to them (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Byrne, 1971; Homans, 1961; Lott & Lott, 1972). This study assumes that the enhancement of the individual's goal of a predictable and controllable environment achieved during initial interactions would be rewarding to the individual. If this assumption is valid, then attraction to relative strangers should be greater after initial interactions which increase predictability, provided that these interactions do not lead to arguments or other negative reinforcement. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis concerning the relationship of initial interaction and attraction.

H_1: Among individuals who are strangers to one another, individuals who engage in brief, non-punishing interactions will be more attracted to one another than individuals who do not.

Attitude Similarity and Attraction

While the impact of initial interaction on attraction has received little empirical scrutiny, the attitude similarity-attraction relationship has been extensively studied. Research on this relationship consistently demonstrates that these two variables are positively

related (Byrne, 1971; Clore & Baldridge, 1968; Griffitt, 1969; Hunt, 1935; Newcomb, 1961; Newcomb & Svehla, 1937; Winslow, 1937). Recently, most of this research has focused on the attraction of individuals to strangers based on information about the stranger's attitudes. This research indicates that individuals who have never met are more attracted to one another if they think they are attitudinally similar than if they think they are attitudinally dissimilar (Byrne, 1961; Griffitt, 1969).

The voluminous research on this relationship along with the posited reinforcement properties of attitude similarity, leads to the following replication hypothesis concerning the impact of attitude similarity on both pre- and post-interaction attraction.

H_2: Individuals who are aware that another is attitudinally similar will be more attracted to the other than individuals who are aware that another is attitudinally dissimilar.

Initial Interaction-Attitude Similarity and Attraction

While numerous studies have dealt with the impact of attitude similarity on attraction, no reported research has systematically examined the combined impact of attitude similarity and typical initial interactions. As noted earlier, only Byrne, et. al. (1970) report attraction findings for individuals who either did or did not interact with a similar or dissimilar other. While individual measures of attraction among participants who engaged in dates with either similar or dissimilar partners were obtained, the remainder of the study participants examined a bogus questionnaire which portrayed a highly similar or dissimilar stranger. These participants

then rated the stranger's attractiveness. As noted earlier, their results suggest both similar and dissimilar others may be more interpersonally attractive after initial interaction.

Despite Byrne et al.'s finding, one possible reinforcement property of attitude similarity suggests that initial interaction may differentially impact on attraction to similar and dissimilar strangers. This reinforcement property of attitude similarity emanates from the impact of information concerning the state of attitude similarity on the individual's goal of achieving a predictable and controllable environment. Coming into contact with strangers may threaten this goal. Moreover, information which enhances this goal should be rewarding to the individual. Information which indicates that a stranger whom one is about to meet is attitudinally similar will enhance an individual's perceived ability to achieve this goal, but information that the stranger is attitudinally dissimilar will further threaten it. Since the major reinforcement property of initial interaction stems from the enhancement of this same goal, initial interaction should combine with attitudinal similarity to produce somewhat different consequences for interpersonal attraction.

When an individual receives information that another is attitudinally similar prior to interacting with him or her, the individual may perceive that the behavior of the other is more predictable. As suggested earlier, individuals may infer that interactions with the other will proceed normally which would increase the perceived predictability of the initial interaction. This increase in predictability will be positively rewarding to the individual and

positively influence attraction. However, information which indicates that another is attitudinally dissimilar should have a somewhat different effect.

Information that another with whom the individual will be interacting is attitudinally dissimilar may decrease the perceived predictability of the other's interaction behavior. This information would indicate that future interactions with the other may or may not lead to disagreements. This ambiguity concerning how the initial interaction will proceed should decrease the individual's perception of the predictability of the interaction which will be negatively reinforcing. This negatively reinforcing decrease in predictability should negatively impact on attraction.

It has been proposed that the major reinforcement property of initial interaction emanates from the enhancement of the individual's goal of a predictable and controllable environment. If the argument outlined above concerning attitude similarity is accurate, the reinforcements obtained during initial interaction should have a different impact on attraction to attitudinally similar and dissimilar strangers. Specifically, if pre-interaction information that another is attitudinally similar increases perceived predictability, then the posited reinforcement property of initial interaction should not have a strong impact. However, if information that another is attitudinally dissimilar decreases perceived predictability, then this reinforcement property of initial interactions should have a strong influence on attraction, provided that the interactions proceed routinely and do not lead to disagreement or other negative reinforcement. Thus,

initial interaction with a similar other should increase predicatility and attraction to a slight degree while initial interaction with dissimilar others should increase preditability and attraction to a greater degree. This reasoning suggests the following hypothesis concerning the conjoint effects of attitude similarity and initial interactions on attraction among individuals who are strangers:

H_3: Individuals who engage in brief, non-threatening interactions with a partner will be more attracted to their partner whan those who do not, but this effect will be greater for individuals with an attitudinally dissimilar partner.

METHODS

Selection of Participants and Attitude Topics

To test the hypotheses, it was necessary to use participants who were known to be attitudinally similar or dissimilar prior to the experiment. The attitudes of 540 students enrolled in beginning communication classes at Michigan State University toward 14 topics were solicited on the first day of classes of the winter term. Students were asked to place their names on the questionnaire to enable the researcher to contact them for later participation.

Nine of these topics and the scales employed to measure them were taken from Byrne's 56-item Attitude Scale (1971). Five other topics were either modifications of items taken from this scale constructed to conform to current issues involving the topics or new topics of current social interest. A six-point scale, ranging from "very much in favor" to "very much opposed," was used to measure

individual's attitudes toward each topic. Two of these topics, attitudes toward the construction of nuclear power plants and preparedness for war, were chosen to provide the attitude similarity manipulation primarily because the greatest diversity of attitudes occurred on these topics.

Responses to these topics were dichotomized into positive and negative responses. An individual could fall into one of four categories: positive attitudes toward both topics; negative attitudes toward both; a positive attitude toward the construction of nuclear power plants and a negative attitude toward preparedness for war; or a negative attitude toward the construction of nuclear power plants and a positive attitude toward preparedness for war.

Attitudinally similar pairs were produced by soliciting randomly selected individuals from within each of these categories to attend the same experimental session. Fourteen different sessions were scheduled for the attitudinally similar conditions. During these sessions only individuals with similar attitudes toward the two topics were scheduled to attend. Seven to eight individuals were scheduled for each of these sessions to compensate for attrition.

Attitudinally dissimilar pairs were produced by soliciting randomly selected individuals from within two different pairs of categories to attend 14 further experimental sessions. The two pairs of categories which were employed to produce attitudinally dissimilar pairs were individuals with positive attitudes toward both topics with individuals with negative attitudes toward both and individuals with positive attitudes toward the construction of nuclear power plants and negative attitudes toward preparedness for war with those who held negative attitudes toward the construction of nuclear power

plants and positive attitudes toward preparedenss for war. Again, seven to eight individuals were scheduled for each of these sessions.

Only participants of the same sex were chosen as partners in the present study. While it would have been interesting to examine opposite-sex dyads, there are no theoretical reasons to expect or research evidence to indicate that the outcome for opposite-sex and same-sex partners would differ. Consequently, it was decided that same-sex partners would be employed.

A total of 210 individuals were contacted in their communication classes during the fifth week of the term and solicited to attend one of the 28 experimental sessions. Each was given a sheet of paper which contained the time s/he had been scheduled to participate and the room to which s/he was to report. Of these 210 individuals, 124 actually participated in the study. The remainder failed to attend their scheduled session.

Experimental Procedures

Upon arrival each participant was escorted to a separate room to eliminate the possibility of interaction between participants. Each individual was told s/he would be participating on a project with another beginning communication student and that this project would involve the topics of the construction of nuclear power plants and preparedness for war. Participants were informed they would be exchanging their general attitudes about these topics with their partner prior to meeting him/her. They were told this exchange of attitudes would help them in working on the project with their partner. Moreover, they were informed that, in part, the research was examining individuals' ability to make accurate predictions about

another based on limited information such as the other's attitudes. Finally, they were told that after exchanging attitudes they would be asked to make some predictions about their partner in order to examine this question. This cover story provided a rationale for exchanging attitudes on the two topics and for obtaining measures of interpersonal attraction.

After reading the instructions, participants were asked to respond to a dichotomous measure of their attitudes toward both of the selected topics. These responses were then exchanged by the researcher who told the participants to examine their partner's responses and to form some opinion of their partner. As indicated, in 14 of the sessions this exchange provided individuals with the information that their partner was attitudinally similar, while in the remaining 14 this exchange informed participants that their partner was attitudinally dissimilar.

During each session one dyad was randomly selected to engage in an initial interaction. Interacting dyads were informed that a separate study was being conducted in which videotapes of persons engaging in an initial conversation were being made. These participants were asked if they would mind being videotaped while interacting with their partner for a five minute period. All selected dyads agreed and were then brought together in a conference room containing a one-way mirror through which the videotape equipment could record the conversation. The experimenter left the room with the instructions that he would return in five minutes to get them started on the next phase of the project. The individuals who had not been selected to engage in an

initial interaction were left alone in their room during this five minute period.

After this period in which interaction either did or did not occur, participants were escorted back to their original rooms to complete a questionnaire which included a measure of their attraction to their partner. This attraction measure consisted of three items measured by seven-point scales. Two items, how much the individual feels s/he will like his/her partner and how much s/he will like working with his/her partner, were adapted from Byrne's Interpersonal Judgment Scale. The remaining item asked participants to estimate how likely they would be to choose their assigned partner to work with on the future project if they were given a choice. Responses to these three items were summed to produce the attraction measure. An alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .847 was obtained for this measure indicating a fair degree of internal consistency among the items. After completing the questionnaire all participants were informed of the purpose of the study and completely debriefed.

Design

A 2 X 2 X 2 independent groups design with two levels of attitude similarity (completely similar or dissimilar), two levels of initial interaction (five minutes of interaction or no interaction), and two levels of sex (male or female respondent) was employed. While no predictions were made concerning sex differences, the sex variable was included in the analysis to examine possible differences attributable to this variable.

A total of 60 males and 64 females participated. Their average age was 19.24 years, ranging from 17 to 28 years of age. Fourteen individuals were assigned to each of the following situations:

attitudinally similar male and female participants who interacted with same-sex partners, attitudinally dissimilar male and female participants who interacted with same-sex partners, and attitudinally similar male participants who did not interact with their same-sex partners. Eighteen individuals were assigned to the remaining three situations: attitudinally dissimilar male and female participants who did not interact with their same-sex partners, and attitudinally similar female participants who did not interact with their same-sex partners.

RESULTS

For all statistical tests the .05 significance level was employed.

While the respondents' initial attitude extremity was not considered when assigning participants to the different experimental conditions, it was felt that this variable might influence the results. Numerous studies have shown that the discrepancy between an individual's attitudes and the attitudes of a stranger influence attraction independently of the attitude similarity variable (Byrne, 1971; Nelson, 1965). This suggests that in the present situation the extremity of an individual's attitudes might impact on the attraction variable.

To examine this possibility and to determine if attitude extremity should be considered as a covariate in analyzing the data, the individuals' pre-interaction responses to the six-point attitude scales concerning nuclear power plants and preparedness for war were examined. For each topic, regardless of the direction of the individuals' attitudes, those who responded with the most extreme attitudes (responses of 1 or 6) were assigned a score of 3 on

attitude extremity, those who held moderate attitudes (responses of 2 or 5) were assigned a score of 2 on attitude extremity, and those who held the least extreme attitudes (responses of 3 or 4) were assigned a score of 1 on attitude extremity. The attitude extremity scores for each topic were then correlated with the attraction measures for individuals who had been paired with similar partners and with dissimilar partners. For individuals with similar partners, attitude extremity toward nuclear power plants correlated -.08 with attraction while extremity in attitudes toward preparedness for war correlated -.04. For individuals with dissimilar partners the observed correlations were .10 and .07 respectively. These low correlations indicate that attitude extremity was not influencing attraction and the extremity variable was discarded as a covariate.

Tests of Hypotheses

As a preliminary step, a three-way analysis of variance employing unweighted means was conducted on the data. Significant main effects were observed for attitude similarity ($F=24.29$, $df=1/116$); initial interaction ($F=17.24$, $df=1/116$); and sex ($F=6.87$, $df=1/116$). A significant non-additive effect was observed for the similarity and initial interaction variables ($F=9.93$, $df=1/116$). No other significant non-additive effects were observed. An estimate of the amount of variance explained by each of these significant effects indicated that the attitude similarity main effect accounted for 13% of the variance, while initial interaction accounted for 9% of the variance, sex 3%, and the non-additive effect of attitude similarity and initial interaction 5%.

Since the sex variable did not combine with the other two independent variables to produce any significant non-additive effects, the marginal means for male and female respondents on the attraction

measure were examined to determine the direction of the relationship indicated by the significant sex main effect. The average attraction of female respondents to their same-sex partners was 16.65 (s=3.29, n=64) while the average attraction of male respondents to their same-sex partner was 15.32 (s=3.08, n=60) indicating that females were slightly more attracted to their partners than males.

Given the lack of non-additive effects involving the sex variable, the marginal means for attitude similarity and initial interaction were examined to determine the nature of the non-additive effects of these two variables. These marginal means are presented in Table 1. The pattern of the results conforms to the prediction made in Hypothesis 3; i.e., the means on attraction for interactants fall above the means for non-interactants and the difference in attraction between interactants and non-interactants is greater for individuals paired with a dissimilar partner.

Table 1 about here

Analysis of the simple main effects for attitude similarity and initial interaction revealed that attitude similarity produced significantly greater attraction than attitude dissimilarity among persons who did not interact with their partner ($t=6.17$, $df=116$), but that among persons who interacted attitude similarity and dissimilarity did not produce differences in attraction ($t=1.20$, $df=116$). Moreover, interactants were more attracted to their partner than non-interactants when their partner was dissimilar ($t=5.25$, $df=116$), but among individuals paired with similar partners interactants were no more attracted to their partners than non-interactants ($t<1$, $df=116$).

This analysis indicates that the ordinal, non-additive effects of attitude similarity and initial interaction produced results which support neither Hypothesis 1, which predicts that interactants

will be more attracted to one another than non-interactants regardless of the state of attitude similarity, nor Hypothesis 2, which predicts that attitudinally similar individuals will be more attracted to one another than attitudinally dissimilar individuals regardless of the level of initial interaction. Apparently, then, the brief initial interaction eliminated the impact of the attitude similarity variable on attraction by increasing attraction to dissimilar partners.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that initial interaction and attitude similarity combine non-additively to influence attraction to relative strangers. Initial interaction had a positive impact on attraction, but only for individuals paired with attitudinally dissimilar partners. Individuals paired with attitudinally similar partners were more attracted to their partner than individuals paired with attitudinally dissimilar partners, but only when they had not engaged in an initial interaction with their partner. This pattern of results supports Hypothesis 3, which predicts that initial interaction has a greater positive influence on attraction to dissimilar strangers than to similar strangers. However, neither Hypothesis 1, which predicts that initial interaction has a positive influence on attraction regardless of the state of attitude similarity, nor Hypothesis 2, which predicts that attitude similarity is more attractive than dissimilarity regardless of the level of initial interaction, were supported.

This study also found that female respondents were slightly more attracted to their same-sex partners than male respondents. As noted,

the sex variable accounted for only three percent of the variance in attraction suggesting that its influence, if any, is small. This discussion will first attempt to explain this finding for the sex variable. The non-additive influence of initial interaction and attitude similarity will then be discussed.

The finding that female respondents were more attracted to female partners than were males to male partners conflicts with the results of previous research in the bogus stranger tradition conducted by Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968) which found no difference in attraction to same-sex partners among male and female participants. While the seemingly conflicting findings of Byrne et al. and the current study may be attributable to sampling error, one major difference in the procedures may account for these conflicting findings. Participants in the present study were led to believe they would be working with their partner on a project in the near future. No such expectation was created by Byrne et al. Perhaps this expectation led to the sex differences observed in the current study. In this culture, males would be more likely than females to perceive that this future interaction situation, in which they would be working with their same-sex partner, would be competitive in nature. As Shaw (1971; pp. 168-169) points out, much of the research focusing on small group behavior has found that "women more often than men adopt an anticompetitive norm and attempt to operate so that everyone will benefit."

If the males perceived they would be in a more competitive future interaction with their same-sex partner than did their female counterparts, these different perceptions probably would impact on

the attraction of males and females to their same-sex partner. Specifically, males should be less attracted to their same-sex partner whom they perceive as a competitor, than their female counterparts, who are less likely to perceive their partner as a competitor. While this interpretation accounts for the slight sex differences observed, there are no means of ascertaining whether these differences are attributable to the sex of the respondent, the partner, or both, given the current data on same-sex dyads. Future research which measures individuals' perceptions of competitiveness among same- and opposite-sex dyads is needed to assess the validity of this interpretation and to ascertain if these sex differences are due to sex of respondent, sex of partner , or both.

While a significant main effect was observed, the sex variable did not produce any significant first or second order non-additive effects with the initial interaction or attitude similarity variables. Therefore, the sex of respondent variable will not be considered in interpreting the non-additive effects of attitude similarity and initial interaction.

The findings indicate that attitude similarity and initial interaction combine in a non-additive manner to influence attraction. As predicted by Hypothesis 3, initial interaction had a greater positive impact on attraction for individuals paired with attitudinally dissimilar partners than for those paired with similar partners. As noted, the non-additive effect of these two variables overrode the significant main effects of each, leading to findings which failed to support Hypotheses 1 and 2.

One possible explanation of these findings concerns the

individual's goal of attaining a stable, predictable, and controllable environment. It was suggested earlier that knowing one is about to interact with a stranger would likely threaten this goal. Both the attitude similarity and initial interaction variables should impact on the individual's ability to achieve this goal, thereby influencing attraction to relative strangers. Knowing a stranger is attitudinally similar with respect to relevant topics for future interactions should enhance the individual's perceived ability to achieve this goal and positively influence attraction. Conversely, knowing a stranger is attitudinally dissimilar should further disrupt the individual's perceived ability to achieve this goal and negatively influence attraction. Moreover, having the opportunity to engage in brief, non-punishing initial interactions with the relative stranger should enhance the individual's perceived ability to predict the future interaction behaviors of the stranger and lead to the expectation that these interactions will be stable and controllable, thus positively influencing attraction.

If this reasoning is correct, then the only instance where individuals did not have the opportunity to attain their goal of a stable, predictable, and controllable environment with respect to future interactions with the stranger occurred in the attitudinally dissimilar-no interaction condition. Individuals in this condition rated their partner as far less attractive than individuals in any other condition, indeed, they were less attracted to their partners than either their attitudinally dissimilar, interacting or attitudinally similar, non-interacting counterparts as predicted by Hypotheses 1 and 2.

This reasoning also explains the failure to support the remaining prediction made by Hypothesis 1; i.e., that similar interactants would be more attracted to their partners than similar non-interactants. Specifically, if knowing that another whom one is about to interact with is attitudinally similar with respect to topics relevant to this future interaction enables the individual to achieve his/her goal of a stable, predictable, and controllable environment, then this reinforcement property of initial interaction should have relatively little impact on attraction.

Failure to support the remaining prediction made by Hypothesis 2, that attitudinally similar interactants would be more attracted to one another than attitudinally dissimilar interactants, cannot be fully explained by the original perspective taken in this study. This prediction was based primarily on the assumption that the attitude similarity variable influences an individual's ability to achieve yet another goal, to be accurate and logical in interpreting one's environment. This assumption is based on Festinger's (1954) notion that nonsocially unverifiable attitudes can only be validated through comparison to the attitudes held by others. Knowing that others' attitudes are dissimilar to the individual's leads to attitudinal invalidation and threatens the goal of being accurate and logical in interpreting the environment, which is negatively reinforcing and negatively influences attraction. Conversely, knowing that another's attitudes are similar enhances the individual's perception that s/he is accurate and logical in interpreting the environment, which is positvely reinforcing and positively influences attraction. This reasoning led to the prediction that attitudinally similar partners

would be more attractive than dissimilar partners. This prediction was supported for non-interactants only; the similar and dissimilar interactants did not differ with respect to attraction to their partners.

This finding of no difference on attraction for similar and dissimilar interactants not only deviates from the perspective outlined above, it also conflicts with findings of past studies reviewed in this paper which allowed participants to interact and found similar interactants were more attracted to their partners than dissimilar interactants (Brewer & Brewer, 1968; Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970; Byrne & Griffitt, 1966). However, the present procedures differ from those of past studies on a number of dimensions which could have led to these conflicting findings.

Probably the most important procedural differences involve the number of attitude topics employed to manipulate attitude similarity and the type of interaction allowed participants. Only two attitude topics were involved in the attitude similarity manipulation. This was a sufficient number to produce the usual attitude similarity-attraction relationship among non-interactants but not among interactants. Past studies which allowed participants to interact employed a greater number of topics in manipulating attitude similarity with the fewest being seven in the Byrne and Griffitt study. It may be that two topics were insufficient to influence attraction after participants engaged in an initial interaction with their partner, but that more topics would produce significant differences in post-interaction attraction due to the attitude similarity variable.

While increasing the number of topics employed to manipulate attitude similarity may produce the usual attitude similarity-attraction relationship among individuals engaging in initial interactions, it should be noted that in most normal situations attitudinal information about strangers is unlikely to be very extensive; i.e., information is likely to consist of attitudes toward just a few topics relevant to future interaction. If so, results of the present study suggest that attitude similarity will not have a strong influence on attraction to strangers after individuals have engaged in initial interactions with them. However, it is possible that attitude similarity may regain an influence on attraction when the attitudinal topics become relevant during later stages of the interaction.

Although differences in the number of topics employed in the present and past studies may explain the conflicting results for the attitude similarity-attraction relationship, it is possible that the similarity-attraction relationship is highly ephemeral and easily erased by brief communicative exchanges. This speculation suggests that something other than the number of attitude topics employed may have led to the contradictory findings in the current and past studies. Yet another procedural difference that could account for these differences involves the type of interaction that took place.

In this study interactants thought that their interaction was for another study which was examining normal interaction behavior between individuals. This perception led to interactions in which participants exchanged primarily demographic information; e.g., names, college majors, hometowns. None of the dyads chose to discuss the

revealed attitudinal topics. As Berger and Calabrese (1975) note, during normal interactions with relative strangers individuals prefer to avoid attitudinal topics and to exchange precisely this sort of demographic information. Thus, it would appear that the interactions involved in the present study were normal as far as the type of information exchanged by participants is concerned.

The normal, non-punishing interactions which occurred in the present study were unlike the interactions which took place in past studies in which attitudinal similarities and dissimilarities were revealed during the interaction (Brewer & Brewer, 1968; Byrne, Ervin & Lambeth, 1979; Byrne & Griffitt, 1966). As these studies indicate revealing either attitudinal similarities or dissimilarities during initial interactions has different implications for attraction, with similar partners being more attracted to one another than dissimilar partners. However, the findings of the present study suggest that when initial interactions proceed normally, the attitude similarity variable has no impact on post-interaction attraction.

The possibility that the type of interactions involved in the present study led to conflicting findings has serious implications for research focusing on the attitude similarity-attraction relationship. As noted, individuals typically do not discuss attitudinal topics during the initial stage of relational development. If so, past studies have, to a greater or lesser extent, not allowed interactants to go through the initial non-punishing stage in which interactants in the present study participated. Failure to include this initial stage may lead to a highly distorted interpretation of the relationship of the influence of the attitude similarity and

interaction variables in the attraction process. The findings of this study suggest that initial interaction reduces the negative impact of known attitude dissimilarity on attraction to relative strangers causing them to be as attractive as similar strangers. Future research which allows participants to engage in this initial phase of interaction and then discuss the topics on which they are similar or dissimilar should be undertaken. Perhaps then the attitude similarity variable would re-emerge as an influential variable in the attraction process. However, it is not clear from the present research whether or not this would occur.

Despite these limitations, it is clear that the relationship of attitude similarity and initial interaction to attraction may be extremely complex in the "real" world and that the usual experimental relationship between attitude similarity and attraction may not apply when the complex interactive situations in which people conduct their interpersonal affairs are considered. This indicates that the past research findings of Byrne and his colleagues in this area may not generalize straightforwardly to the "real" world despite previous research which suggests they will. Rather, it appears that additional variables--in this case, the presence or absence of the opportunity to engage in commonplace, non-threatening communication--must also be considered when attempting to assess the impact of attitude similarity on perceived attraction.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations
for Interpersonal Attraction Toward
Similar and Dissimilar Interactants
and Non-Interactants

Interaction Condition	Similarity Condition	
	Similar	Dissimilar
Engaged in Initial Interaction	$\bar{X}$=17.54 s=2.86 n=28	$\bar{X}$=16.68 s=2.74 n=28
Did Not Engage in Initial Interaction	$\bar{X}$=17.16 s=2.62 n=32	$\bar{X}$=13.14 s=2.76 n=36